

does not qualify as a categorical exclusion, the Regional Director shall prepare an environmental assessment.

[45 FR 41142, June 18, 1980, as amended at 46 FR 2049, Jan. 8, 1981; 46 FR 54346, Nov. 3, 1981; 47 FR 13149, Mar. 29, 1982; 52 FR 5285, Feb. 20, 1987; 59 FR 954, Jan. 7, 1994; 61 FR 4230, Feb. 5, 1996; 61 FR 10688, Mar. 15, 1996; 66 FR 57347, Nov. 14, 2001]

§ 10.9 Preparation of environmental assessments.

(a) *When to prepare.* The Regional Director shall begin preparation of an environmental assessment as early as possible after the determination that an assessment is required. The Regional Director may prepare an environmental assessment at any time to assist planning and decision-making.

(b) *Content and format.* The environmental assessment is a concise public document to determine whether to prepare an environmental impact statement, aiding in compliance with NEPA when no EIS is necessary, and facilitating preparation of a statement when one is necessary. Preparation of an environmental assessment generally will not require extensive research or lengthy documentation. The environmental assessment shall contain brief discussion of the following:

- (1) Purpose and need for the proposed action.
 - (2) Description of the proposed action.
 - (3) Alternatives considered.
 - (4) Environmental impact of the proposed action and alternatives.
 - (5) Listing of agencies and persons consulted.
 - (6) Conclusion of whether to prepare an environmental impact statement.
- (c) *Public participation.* The Regional Director shall involve environmental agencies, applicants, and the public, to the extent practicable, in preparing environmental assessments. In determining "to the extent practicable," the Regional Director shall consider:
- (1) Magnitude of the proposal;
 - (2) Likelihood of public interest;
 - (3) Need to act quickly;
 - (4) Likelihood of meaningful public comment;
 - (5) National security classification issues;
 - (6) Need for permits; and

(7) Statutory authority of environmental agency regarding the proposal.

(d) *When to prepare an EIS.* The Regional Director shall prepare an environmental impact statement for all major Agency actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. The test of what is a "significant" enough impact to require an EIS is found in the CEQ regulations at 40 CFR 1508.27.

(e) *Finding of No Significant Impact.* If the Regional Director determines on the basis of the environmental assessment not to prepare an environmental impact statement, the Regional Director shall prepare a finding of no significant impact in accordance with 40 CFR 1501.4(e) of the CEQ regulations. The assessment and the finding shall be submitted to the Environmental Officer and the Office of General Counsel (OGC) for approval. If Environmental Officer and OGC approval is obtained, the Regional Director shall then make the finding of no significant impact available to the public as specified in § 1506.6 of the CEQ regulations. A finding of no significant impact is not required when the decision not to prepare an environmental impact statement is based on a categorical exclusion.

(f) *Environmental Officer or OGC Disallowance.* If the Environmental Officer or OGC disagrees with the finding of no significant impact, the Regional Director shall prepare an environmental impact statement. Prior to preparation of an EIS, the Regional Director shall forward a notice of intent to prepare the EIS to the Environmental Officer who shall publish such notice in the FEDERAL REGISTER.

(g) *EIS determination of Regional Director.* The Regional Director may decide on his/her own to prepare an environmental impact statement. In such case, the Regional Director shall forward a notice of intent to prepare the EIS to the Environmental Officer who shall publish such notice in the FEDERAL REGISTER. The notice of intent shall be published before initiation of the scoping process.

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